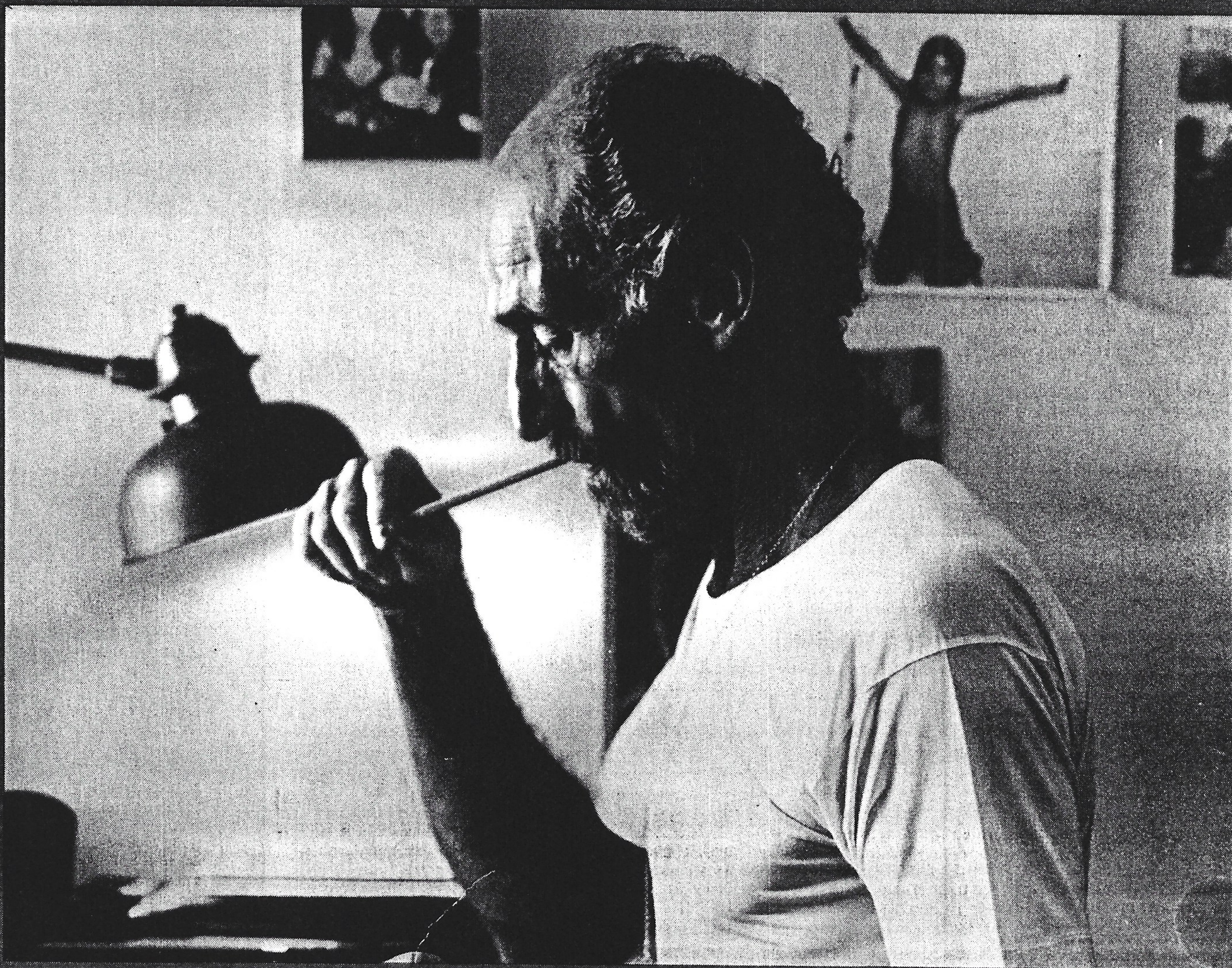


The Studio Exchange



Alan Douglas

The Studio Exchange recently caught up with Alan Douglas, producer of Jimi Hendrix in his last days with his Band Of Gypsys. Douglas is re-releasing Jimi's legendary performance at Woodstock to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the festival, following the very successful *The Jimi Hendrix Experience Live At Winterland* and last year's *Radio One* both of which featured previously un-released tracks. Douglas, sole-proprietor of all existing Hendrix masters, has taken up the responsibility of preserving Jimi's musical legacy for all his existing fans and the future generations who have yet to discover him.

Contents

Electric Lady - 20 Years by Billy Messinetti	50
Alan Douglas by Danny McCue	51
The Studio Report	53
More Than MIDI	54
Electronic Musician	54
Product Reviews	
Akai A-DAM	55
Reunion Bass Bag	55
Sabian	56
Stylus Pick	57
Guitool	57
Product Previews	
The latest NAMM advances	58
Studio Notes	61

Alan Douglas

Seeing Hendrix Safely Into The '90s

When it comes to Jimi, Douglas' work as producer is only surpassed by his attention as friend.

by Danny McCue

Alan Douglas first met Jimi Hendrix when a mutual friend brought the guitarist to Douglas' home in London. It was the early summer of 1968, and Hendrix had just severed his ties with his management, producer and the Jimi Hendrix Experience. Up to this time, Douglas, whose tastes tended more toward black jazz than psychedelic rock 'n' roll, had worked with an impressive succession of jazz greats — among them, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Charles Mingus and John Coltrane. He had also sought to develop a film, book and TV package for the late Lenny Bruce. It was this interest in a multi-media approach to the creative arts that brought Douglas and Hendrix together as friends. The course of both their careers would change irreversibly over the next few months, with Douglas not only producing the *Band Of Gypsies*, but also becoming the proprietor of all existing Hendrix masters.

Early in 1987, some 16 years after producing the posthumous Hendrix releases *Crash Landing* and *Midnight Lightning*, Douglas initiated his ongoing relationship with Rykodisc, the small, Massachusetts-based label that was then basking in the high media profile accorded its simultaneous release of eight Frank Zappa titles on CD. What Douglas found in Rykodisc was a small company putting its priorities behind previously released or obscure material, released in a state-of-the-art format (the label has since begun releasing recordings in all three formats). He saw some parallels between their corporate objectives and what he wanted to do with the material in the Hendrix vault.

Jimi Hendrix Live At Woodstock, the third in a continuing series of Rykodisc Hendrix issues, will be released this year to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the Woodstock Music And Arts Festival. The previous two were the very successful *The Jimi Hendrix Experience Live At Winterland* and last year's *Radio One*, a compilation of vintage Hendrix radio performances culled from the vaults of the BBC. Another historic Hendrix performance, his last, the legendary *Isle Of Wight* concert, is scheduled to be released in August 1990.

THE STUDIO EXCHANGE: How did you get involved with Rykodisc?

ALAN DOUGLAS: At the time that we made the licensing arrangement with Rykodisc, Warner Brothers was not releasing any Hendrix material on CD — and what was almost more unfortunate, in my view, was that what was coming out on PolyGram was

inferior product. The company was taking the equalized masters that the LPs and cassettes were made from and basically just converting them with some equalization. What happens when you do it that way is [that] you also transfer all the flaws in the sound. We've got a responsibility to Hendrix to deal with. This has got to be of maximum quality, so we decided that we ought to handle it ourselves. Besides the question of quality, the other factor in my deciding to approach Rykodisc was the attitude of the major labels, who looked at Hendrix material as catalog sales, putting very little promotional or marketing commitment behind it.

TSE: If we can take a step back for a moment, could you explain the qualitative differences between an equalized master and a studio master?

DOUGLAS: When we get through with a studio mix and transfer it directly over to digital, when we reproduce from that we're getting the maximum sound quality possible. Also, once you begin dealing with an analog master that has already been equalized, you lock in a lot of your options. In digital, there are just so many more noise reduction possibilities, you have a more direct way of dealing with mid ranges, between-mid ranges and highs and lows.

When you get through with a mix in the studio, that's when you consider what the sound should be like, but when you send it to a mastering lab, there are certain equalizations that have to be done to try and main-

tain that sound as you contact each medium, as you go from tape to disc to lacquers, mothers and stampers and so on. You go through a lot of generations going from that original tape to a vinyl record and they try to compensate for all these generational turnovers. By going directly to digital you eliminate all those steps, but when working with an already equalized master you lose that opportunity to go straight across from what you originally mixed.

TSE: What prompted you to make *The Jimi Hendrix Experience Live At Winterland* the first Rykodisc release?

DOUGLAS: Well those concerts at Winterland — it's actually made up of six shows that took place over the space of three days — were among the best he ever did; it was probably the first time he had worked in one venue for so long and he had a chance to work out a lot of material and stretch out on already existing material. After the third night in the same venue we got to feeling very comfortable in those surroundings and that contributes a great deal to the sound of the recording. Add to that the fact that it was originally recorded in 8 track and you can see that we had the opportunity to do something special. Part of Jimi's vitality was his improvisational skill, and the Winterland stand allowed us the opportunity to pick those instances where it gelled best.

TSE: OK, now shortly after the release of *Winterland*, I spoke to you about what was then the imminent release of the *Isle Of*

Wight concert. What happened to that project?

DOUGLAS: It just got put on the back burner for the time being because the *Radio One* thing came up. Around the same time we decided to start relating projects to anniversary dates, which gives us a little bit of promotional tag and helps raise the record buying public's consciousness.

What we're trying to do now is make *Woodstock* the next one and then follow that with the *Isle Of Wight*.

TSE: Were the *Radio One* tapes in the archives all along?

DOUGLAS: No, we acquired those from the BBC. We had been trying to acquire them for five years and, finally, we got it done.

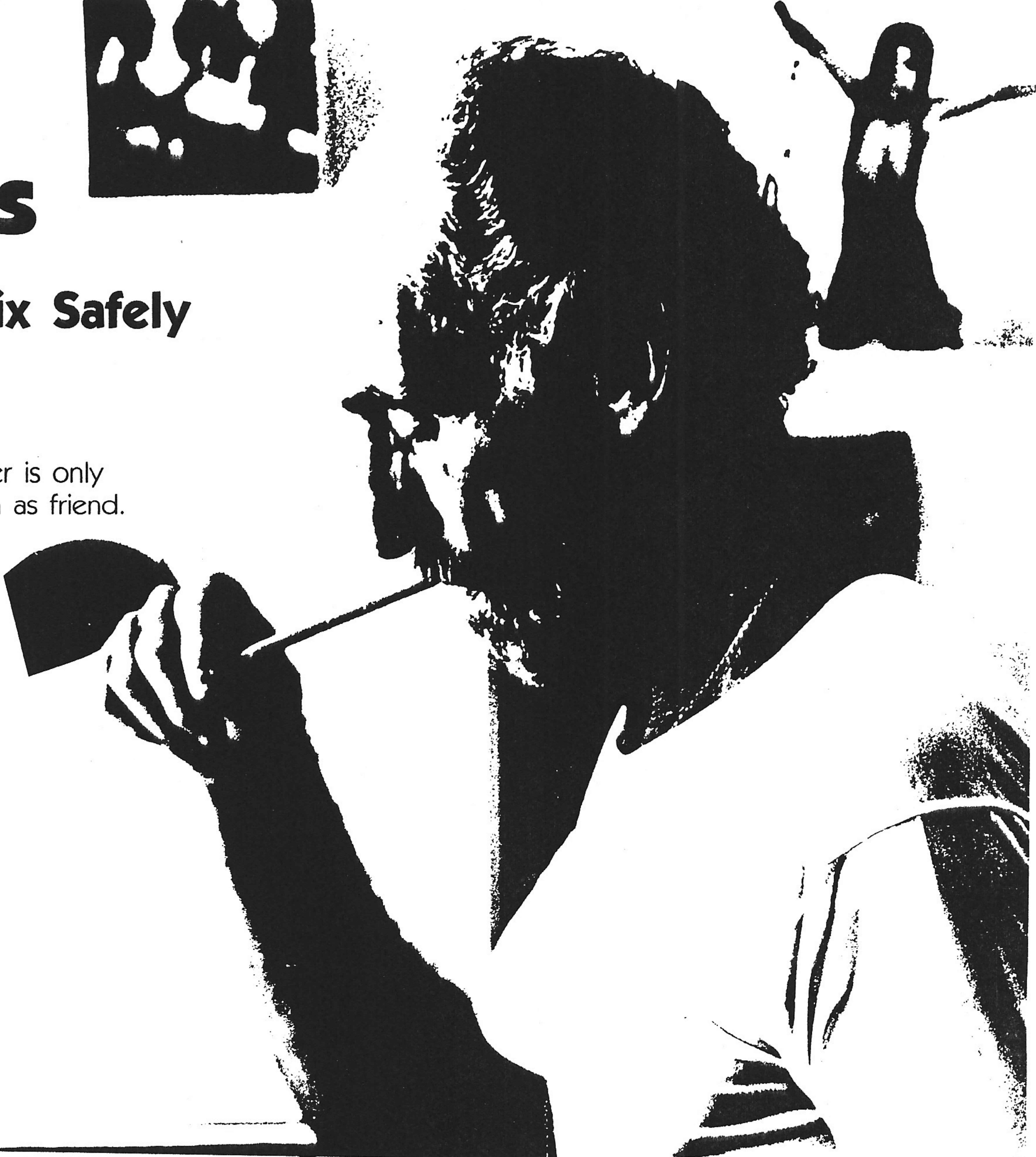
TSE: Did those '60s broadcast quality tapes require a lot of work to bring them up to '80s standards?

DOUGLAS: Oh yeah, of course. . . First of all, it was all recorded in mono, so the first thing we did was to take advantage of this relatively new system called Sound Solutions, which was created in San Francisco, and we spent a great deal of time and money up there. Joe Gastwirt, who supervises the mastering of all Hendrix product was there with them and worked for a long time cleaning up all the tapes and trying to get the sound that you now hear as the *Radio One* disc. It really was a case of tender loving care and high technology working in concert.

TMP: Then you went directly into the

continued on pg. 52

TMP's Studio Exchange, August 1989 51



ALAN DOUGLAS
continued from pg. 51

Woodstock project. How long was Hendrix's performance at Woodstock?

DOUGLAS: Well it was a two hour show, but we wouldn't do the whole show. We're thinking of between 50 minutes to an hour.

TSE: What are your ideas about what you're physically going to have to do with it?

DOUGLAS: Pretty much what we have to do with everything. The first thing we do is transfer the original tapes up to 24 or 32 track digital tape and then, depending on the condition of the tape, we begin the sound reduction process. There are times when you listen to the multitrack and you find out that a particular track needs work, then we'll work the sound reduction system before we mix. If we feel that it's just an overall sound reduction system that we need, concerning basically tape noise, hiss and that kind of thing, then we mix first and do the sound reduction afterwards. Each tape is a different story.

TSE: Were you actually at Woodstock to tape it yourself?

DOUGLAS: I didn't tape it, but I was there. Woodstock was before I was involved with Jimi in a business sense. We were strictly friends up to that point.

TSE: What is your opinion of how the Woodstock show was recorded?

DOUGLAS: It's good. It's not great, but it's good. It's sufficient for us to now take it and make it sound great. There aren't any great problems in the sense that we can't fix it. In a live recording you get a lot of amplifier buzz and crackle, it's electric. . . and in a studio you have more control of electricity than you do in a live situation. This is exactly what we use Sound Solutions for, to take all those nonessential sounds off the tapes.

TSE: As someone who had the opportunity to actually record him live, did you ever find Hendrix difficult to record in a concert situation?

DOUGLAS: Not difficult to record technically, because his sound was so definite, there was nothing tentative about the way he played. Recording anybody live is a mic-ing problem more than anything, a question of the proper microphones relative to the environment and their placement and the coordination between the mics and the tape machines, because you don't make any effort to do any kind of equalization. The best thing is to get it as raw as you can get it live and then start dealing with equalization, and all the rest of it, in the studio.

TSE: How does the ambiance of the sound of the Woodstock tapes compare to the Live At Winterland project? Winterland had a certain warmth that I don't imagine the Woodstock tapes would have.

DOUGLAS: Well, y'know, the "warmth" of Winterland can be directly attributed to the fact that it was done inside, in a relatively small room, and it was a well done recording. You get a more intimate sound inside than you will outside. Outside you get a lot of sound floating, sound that goes up in the air and doesn't come back down, whereas in a room you get bounce off the walls and ceiling and so on. Once you understand what the acoustics are in a particular room, you can adjust to them; outside the conditions are always changing. In one song you might have wind coming up and then you might be getting airdrafts. . . you just don't know what conditions are going to exist from moment to moment.

TSE: Was Jimi Hendrix very conscious of the fact he was being recorded when he was onstage?

DOUGLAS: I don't think he really thought about anything like that. He just got onstage and played, and unfortunately he died before we had an opportunity to really listen to all the material together, so that now, we have to make all the objective choices about what to release without him. I don't think Jimi thought about whether it was being recorded or not. When it was time to play he just went onstage and did it.

TSE: As someone who was a spectator at Woodstock, what are your thoughts on Hendrix's performance there?

DOUGLAS: Well, Woodstock was not his greatest show. Well, I shouldn't say that; in some ways it was and in others it wasn't. From a negative point of view, it wasn't a very well-rehearsed band. If you remember, it was before the Band of Gypsies really got started and it was the end of the Experience; one was over and the other hadn't really started. The Woodstock band was composed of Mitch Mitchell on drums, Billy Cox on bass, Larry Lee, who was just a friend of Jimi's from up in Woodstock, playing rhythm guitar, and they were playing Jimi's songs, so the drumming throughout is pretty good. But many of the "classic" songs did not come off the way they should've come off. On the other hand, the improvised material is sensational. Hendrix played some solos at Woodstock that are among the best I ever heard. For example, on the Coalition record, Woodstock One, they went from "Purple Haze" to "The Star Spangled Banner," editing out a six minute solo that is one of the most amazing Hendrix pieces you'll ever hear.

TSE: As a result, are you going to shy away from using the greatest hits?

DOUGLAS: Well, I'm only going to use what works and show Hendrix at his best. "Fire" came off great, for example, as did "Voodoo Chile." Anything that was blues-based, that everybody could get the groove on pretty easily, works. There's a great "Hear My Train" on there, but when it came to the less simply constructed material, the songs begin to lose something.

TSE: As a producer, what did you feel your role was in shaping the Band of Gypsies sound?

DOUGLAS: Well, y'know, you couldn't produce Hendrix. I don't think anybody can

say that they could. The best you could do was help Hendrix produce himself. That was probably my role, more in the conversation with him, shaping the technical aspects and make sure everything was being recorded properly. He's the one that had it in his head as to what he wanted the sound to be and there was no way you could discuss it up front and arrive at the same conclusion, because he would go into the studio with a very definite idea and begin to improvise around it, changing an accent here to make the overall piece feel better, and he'd turn it around right there in the studio.

I always found it difficult to disagree with him musically because the ideas were always exciting, unique and interesting. My role was making sure things got done in the allotted studio time, something that was hard for Jimi because he liked to jam in the studio. Overall, when Jimi was there, the time was good time because there were always ideas floating around. There was always some idea he was developing.

TSE: Did you ever run into any technical problems while trying to capture his improvisations on tapes?

DOUGLAS: Well, once he got a sound on the guitar that he was satisfied with, it was just a question of recording from that point on. Jimi was always very conscious of being out of tune, so there were a lot of starts and stops concerning tuning, but basically all the studio improvisations were in his playing. He'd jump from fuzz to wah-wah to a little feedback, sometimes to combinations of all three. That was just Jimi and we'd just roll the tape.

TSE: In the years since Jimi passed away, would you say that the biggest challenge was putting out the first posthumous release, where you actually had to go in and finish the work that he had started?

DOUGLAS: I got a lot of flack for Crash Landing, but that was an album where I knew exactly what was supposed to be done with it and I did what anybody would've done, which is, if a track isn't working, you take it off. The biggest problem for me as a producer were the tempos, which, almost without exception, were unsteady. Hendrix had the facility to adjust himself so imperceptibly that no one would hear it, but if you'd sit down with a metronome and take the bass and drum off, you'd find that the tempo changed constantly, sometimes over the course of four bars, sometimes over eight, sometimes 16. And so when we did our overdubs it required musicians who were capable of playing like that all the way through. That's why I felt I couldn't go back and get Mitch and Noel or Mitch and Billy; I needed musicians who were patient in the studio, who would play short pieces over and over in the studio and not get burned out. It was very difficult, hard work, but when all is said and done, nobody knows that the tempos are different all the way through.

TSE: What do you think it is about Jimi Hendrix that makes him so commercially viable. What keeps him as popular, maybe more popular today, than he was when he was playing?

DOUGLAS: Usually nostalgic figures, the audience that relates is the one that was there in the first place, but Hendrix has a very young audience; kids are discovering him all the time. If you look at the sales figures for Winterland alone, you can see that it's gone way beyond the collectors. If you discuss guitar playing alone, apart from the rest of his talents, there are millions of guitar players in the world and they have to refer to Hendrix. He created a school of playing and he's still an outlaw. The mainstream hasn't absorbed him yet. People still refer to him as the avant garde.

TAYLOR DAYNE BARRY MANILOW
WHITNEY HOUSTON DEE SNIDER
JENNIFER RUSH BLUE ZONE
NATALIE COLE THE BROS.
APOLLONIA C.C. DIVA
BERNIE SHANNAHAN NICK KAMEN

— 2 GRAMMY NOMINATIONS —

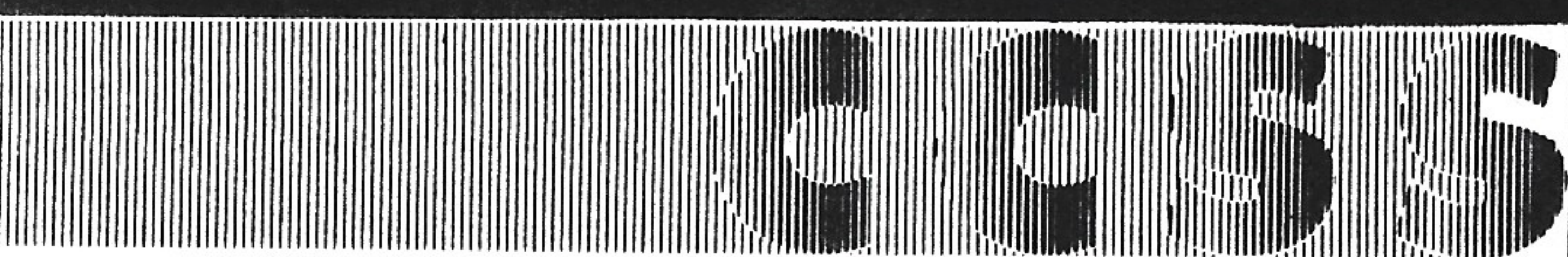
WHAT A YEAR!!

**GRAND
OPENING**

NEW STUDIO A² IN GLEN COVE

**STUDIO A¹ NOW HAS THE ONLY
STUDER A-820 MULTITRACK ON L.I.**

CALL FOR BROCHURE



516-759-9110

Cove City Sound Studios, Inc.
7 Pratt Blvd., Glen Cove, New York 11542

Walk all over it.

But before you do, take a stroll to your mailbox and send \$3 for a color catalog.

Pedulla
The Serious Bass

MA: Pedulla Guitars, Box 226,
Rockland, MA 02370 USA. (617) 871-0073.